What is claimed is:

1   1.   A method for generalized Common Gateway Interface (CGI) processing,

2   comprising:

3   (a) providing a plurality of distinct CGI forms on a server connected to a network;

4   (b) receiving a plurality of distinct user requests over said network; and

5   (c) responding to said requests by invoking a single, generalized CGI processing routine

6   for enabling user data corresponding to said plurality of distinct CGI forms to be entered.

1   2.   The method of claim 1, said step (c) comprising:

2   (d) generating a parameter file from a selected CGI form corresponding to a user request;

3   and

4   (e) presenting said selected CGI form on a display device, to collect user input data

5   corresponding to said selected CGI form.

1   3.   The method of claim 2, said step (d) comprising extracting input field names from

2   said selected CGI form.

1   4.   The method of claim 2, further comprising:

2   reading said user input data based on said parameter file; and

3   formatting said user input data for output to said user.

1   5.   The method of claim 4, further comprising:

2   executing post-processing functions to perform additional specified operations on said user

3   input data;

4   generating an output file including formatted input data and results of said operations; and

5   reporting a result of said request back to said user.

1   6.   The method of claim 5, wherein said post-processing functions include calculations

2   based on said user input and dispatching electronic mail transmitting said output file to a targeted

3   user.

1 7. A system comprising:

2 a network for transmitting a plurality of user requests to a server;

3 a server linked to said network, said server comprising:

4 a plurality of distinct CGI forms corresponding to said requests; and

5 generalized handling means for handling each of said plurality of distinct

6 CGI forms in response to said requests.

1 8. The system of claim 7, said generalized handling means comprising single initial

2 data-gathering means for generating a plurality of distinct parameter files from said plurality of

3 distinct CGI forms.

1 9. The system of claim 8, said generalized handling means further comprising single

2 action means for processing said parameter files and performing user-specified operations

3 corresponding thereto.

1 10. The system of claim 9, said initial data-gathering means further comprising:

2 means for retrieving said distinct CGI forms from said server in response to said requests;

3 and

4 means for presenting said distinct CGI forms to a user and accepting corresponding user

5 input data.

1 11. The system of claim 10, said action means further comprising:

2 means for reading said user input data based on said parameter files;

3 means for formatting said user input data;

4 means for calling post-processing functions to perform additional specified operations on

5 said user input data;

6 means for generating an output file including formatted input data and results of said

7 operations; and

8 means for reporting a result of a request back to a user.

1   12.   The system of claim 11, wherein said post-processing functions include calculations

2   based on said user input and dispatching electronic mail transmitting said output file to a targeted

3   user.

1   13.   In a network linking issuers of requests to a server comprising a plurality of distinct

2   CGI forms, a method comprising:

3   (a) in response to a first request, retrieving a first CGI form from said server and

4   presenting said first CGI form to an issuer of said first request;

5   (b) accepting first input data based on said first CGI form and sending said first input data

6   to said server;

7   (c) in response to a second request, retrieving a second CGI form different from said first

8   CGI form from said server, and presenting said second CGI form to an issuer of said second

9   request;

10   (d) accepting second input data based on said second CGI form and sending said second

11   input data to said server; and

12   (e) using a single CGI form handling program of said server for processing both said first

13   and second CGI forms and first and second input data.

1   14.   The method of claim 13, said step (e) comprising:

2   executing the same initial data gathering routine for each of said first and second requests,

3   said initial data gathering routine comprising the steps of:

4   parsing input fields in the corresponding CGI form to generate a parameter file;

5   displaying the corresponding CGI form on a display device; and

6   generating a submitted CGI form by recording inputs to said corresponding CGI form via

7   said display device.

1   15.   The method of claim 14, said step (e) further comprising:

2   following said initial data gathering routine, executing the same data processing routine for

3   each of said first and second requests, said data processing routine comprising the steps of:

4   (f) reading said parameter file to determine which fields of said submitted CGI form to

5   process;

6   (g) formatting data in fields determined according to step (f); and

7   (h) returning a result of said request to an issuer of said request.

1   16.   The method of claim 15, further comprising:

2   executing a post-processing program, said post-processing program performing operations

3 on said inputs; and

4   sending an output file generated by said post-processing program to an electronic mail

5 address of a target recipient.

1   17.   A computer program product tangibly embodied on a computer-usable medium, said

2 computer program product comprising computer-executable instructions which when executed

3 implement a process comprising:

4   (a) providing a plurality of distinct CGI forms on a server connected to a network;

5   (b) receiving a plurality of distinct user requests over said network; and

6   (c) responding to said requests by invoking a single, generalized CGI processing routine

7 for enabling user data corresponding to said plurality of distinct CGI forms to be entered.

1   18.   The program product of claim 17, said step (c) comprising:

2   (d) generating a parameter file from a selected CGI form corresponding to a user request;

3 and

4   (e) presenting said selected CGI form on a display device, to collect user input data

5 corresponding to said selected CGI form.

1   19.   The program product of claim 18, further comprising:

2   executing post-processing functions to perform additional specified operations on said user

3 input data;

4   generating an output file including formatted input data and results of said operations; and

5   reporting a result of said request back to said user.

1   20.   The program product of claim 19, wherein said post-processing functions include

2   calculations based on said user input and dispatching electronic mail transmitting said output file to

3   a targeted user.